

## Message Text

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S E C R E T STATE 114028

EXDIS, EYES ONLY FOR ASST SEC HOLBROOK FROM EA/VLC BROWN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:PDIP, US, VM

SUBJECT:RIDGWAY KNIGHT'S VISIT TO VIETNAM

1. RIDGWAY KNIGHT HAS BRIEFED US ON HIS VIETNAM VISIT AND PROVIDED WRITTEN REPORT. FOLLOWING ARE QUICK HIGHLIGHTS OF HIS TWO CONVERSATIONS WITH NGUYEN CO THACH APRIL 22 AND 26, THE LATTER OVER A SMALL WORKING DINNER WHICH CAPPED KNIGHT'S STAY. THE ATMOSPHERE THROUGHOUT THE VISIT WAS WARM AND CONSIDERATE, WITH NO PRESSURES. KNIGHT WAS IMPRESSED BY THE SUBTLETY AND INTELLIGENCE OF HIS HOSTS, WHO SHOWED FULL APPRECIATION OF HIS UNOFFICIAL STATUS AND THE NATURE OF HIS MISSION.

2. THACH SAID THAT PRIME MINISTER PHAM VAN DONG HAD BEEN  
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INFORMED OF KNIGHT'S VISIT AND THAT HE CONSIDERED IT "A VERY FRIENDLY GESTURE ON THE PART OF DAVID ROCKEFELLER AND, HOWEVER PRIVATE, ALSO ON THE PART OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT." THACH SAID HE PERSONALLY LOOKED FORWARD GREATLY TO A ROCKEFELLER VISIT. ROCKEFELLER WOULD BE RECEIVED AND TALKED TO BOTH AS A PROMINENT BANKER AND ALSO AS THE OUTSTANDING WORLD STATESMAN WHICH HE IS. PRIME MINISTER DONG

WOULD, OF COURSE, RECEIVE ROCKEFELLER AND LOOKS FORWARD TO A BROAD TOUR D'HORIZON WITH HIM. AS TO TIMING, KNIGHT AND THACH AGREED THAT IT IS A DELICATE MATTER WHICH SHOULD FIT IN WITH "DEVELOPING SITUATION." IT WOULD BE A GREAT PITY INDEED TO WASTE SUCH A VALUABLE--BUT ONE SHOT--ASSET.

3. THACH POINTED OUT THAT "VIETNAM NEEDS EVERYTHING." HE MENTIONED TWO TOP PRIORITIES AS IMPROVING THE HARBOR AND TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRAINING VIETNAM'S EXCELLENT HUMAN RESOURCES RAW MATERIAL. THACH SAID THAT VIETNAM WOULD NOT BE COMPLETELY INDEPENDENT UNTIL ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE WAS ALSO ACHIEVED. TO THIS END, HE SAID, THE AMERICAN CONNECTION IS ESSENTIAL TO COUNTER VIETNAM'S EXCLUSIVE DEPENDENCE ON THE COMMUNIST COUNTRIES.

AMERICAN OIL COMPANIES WOULD BE ESPECIALLY WELCOMED EVEN THOUGH VIETNAM HAD SIGNED AGREEMENTS WITH WEST GERMANY AND ITALIAN COMPANIES AND WAS NOW TALKING TO THE NORWEGIANS. AS TO OLD OFF-SHORE CONCESSIONS GRANTED IN THE SOUTH, "THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT WOULD BE READY TO TALK. WE ARE FLEXIBLE," SAID THACH.

4. AT VARIOUS TIMES DURING TWO MEETINGS WITH THACH, KNIGHT EXPRESSED HIS PRIVATE BELIEF THAT THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT WOULD BE MAKING A GRAVE MISTAKE SHOULD IT THINK THAT IT COULD GET AROUND THE TRADE EMBARGO AND FINANCIAL RESTRICTIONS WITHOUT FULL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

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AND ESTABLISHED EMBASSIES. KNIGHT EXPRESSED HIS PERSONAL FEAR THAT SUCH A COURSE MIGHT EVEN PROVOKE A BOOMERANG EFFECT IN CONGRESS WITH A POSSIBLE ADOPTION OF MORE SPECIFIC RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION. THERE WAS AN EXTENDED EXCHANGE THE FINAL EVENING DURING WHICH THACH AT FIRST SAID THAT "VIETNAM WOULD THEN BE FORCED TO TRADE ELSEWHERE" AND THAT "THE VIETNAMESE ARE VERY PATIENT." AT THE CONCLUSION, HOWEVER, THACH COMMENTED POINTEDLY THAT HE WOULD "GIVE MORE THOUGHT TO THE VIETNAMESE POSITION." KNIGHT SAID HE WAS BY THE MODIFICATION OF THACH'S TONE ON THIS SUBJECT OVER THE COURSE OF THEIR TWO MEETINGS.

5. THACH SAID MORE THAN ONCE DURING THE CONVERSATIONS OF APRIL 22 AND 26 THAT VIETNAM WAS READY TO RESUME BILATERAL TALKS "WHENEVER THE U.S. SIDE WISHES."

6. THACH SAID HE WAS OBLIGED TO QUESTION THE SINCERITY OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT BECAUSE OF THE DINH BA THI EPISODE WHICH WAS "BLOWN OUT OF ALL PROPORTION." KNIGHT SPENT A GOOD DEAL OF TIME REFUTING THIS NOTION WITH THACH AND OTHERS- FROM VARIOUS ALLUSIONS TO THE DINH BA THI AFFAIR KNIGHT GAINED THE IMPRESSION THAT THE VIETNAMESE WERE

GENUINELY MIFFED BUT THAT TIME WOULD HEAL THIS PARTICULAR  
WOUND. CHRISTOPHER

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